

## THE SPUR OF FATE

By Ashley Towne

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The smallest part of a second sufficed for those observations.

"Friends!" yelled Darrell in German. "Prisoners who have escaped the massacre!"

The sound of his native language surprised the captain so much that he screamed a command in the same tongue, his voice high pitched from excitement and overexertion. The soldiers understood his meaning, if not the words, and they advanced without firing. Darrell and Kevski were surrounded by a half savage crew, drunk with the fumes of blood, but the fat little German was a soldier through and through, and he had his men well in hand.

"We're safe as a church," whispered Darrell to Kevski, and then, addressing the captain, in German:

"I was a prisoner here and was saved by this man, who is a friend of Motman Khan, though he was forced to don a Russian uniform."

The captain hesitated for the space of about two seconds—longer than any minutes that Darrell ever remembered to have passed.

"Spare them!" said the captain, and then to Darrell: "Point out this prison. Lead me there."

Darrell waved his hand in the direction of the building, and the party advanced.

"Does Motman Khan command in person?" Darrell asked as he ran on by the officer's side.

The audacity of the question gained an answer for it.

"He has gone on to Vladikaukas," said the officer. "Prince Kilzlar commands."

"I am known to him," said Darrell. "I aided a friend of his in Paris. He will reward you for sparing me."

"You shall be brought before him when this business is over," panted the weary German.

### CHAPTER IX. BETWEEN 15.00 FEET.

PRINCE KILZLAR sat at a table where he had been eating, and the remains of a Gaspardian roast were scattered on the board. He leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar, which he held between his teeth with the burning end tilted up to the level of his eye, and it struck Darrell suddenly that this grizzled soldier, with his square jaw and rough, closely trimmed beard, strongly resembled a very famous New York politician. The thought was humorous, but had its tragic side, for Darrell was at the man's mercy.

Still, except for the sinister appearance of the creature, there was no reason why Darrell should fear any evil at his hands.

"Who are these men?" demanded Kilzlar, and immediately an officer who had been sitting at the end of the table arose and said:

"This one claims to be an American. The other was a turnkey in the prison. They had been serving with the defenders when captured by our troops."

"How is this?" asked the prince, addressing Darrell.

"We were with the defenders, but not of them," replied Darrell. "We offered no resistance to your forces."

"To the best of my information," said Kilzlar, "you were among the prisoners and escaped the massacre by agreeing to serve with the Russians. You occupy the position of a noncombatant bearing arms in violation of the laws of war. It seems to me that you deserve death."

Darrell was mystified. He could see no earthly reason why Kilzlar should treat him with severity.

"Will you answer me one question?" he said. "Is Vera Shevaloff within the Circassian lines?"

"She is a princess of Circassia," said Kilzlar, saluting, "and will be its queen when the state is free."

"Do you think she would desire my death?"

"I don't think it would matter to her one way or the other," replied Kilzlar. "If there were any reason to suppose so, I would spare you until her wishes could be learned. In Paris you befriended her for a time and then betrayed her to the police to save your own skin."

"If I have been led to believe," returned Kilzlar, raising his cigar between his teeth. "But time presses. I wish to hear more evidence in regard to this man's conduct when we took the town."

At this, as if the prince had touched some sort of secret spring, a door opened, and some soldiers entered. With them were a half dozen wretched old men, seemingly citizens of Gredskov. Soldiers and citizens testified like school children reciting verses that Darrell had been seen upon the wall in Russian uniform, armed and fighting like a demon.

"Enough," said the prince at last. "Let these two men be shot."

"At what hour?" asked the officer at the end of the table.

"When the moon rises," answered Kilzlar, removing his cigar and grinning like a gorilla. "It is rather dark outside just now. See to it, Varnek."

"One moment," said Darrell. "You seem to be a stickler for military law. Is this your idea of a court martial?"

"Yes," said Kilzlar calmly; "it is my idea. How do you like it?"

"It has the charm of novelty," answered Darrell, "and the merit of sit-

ting the needs of a cowardly murderer like yourself!"

Kilzlar chewed his cigar fiercely, as if seeking a retort. Then suddenly he waved his arm toward Varnek.

"Take them away," he said.

Immediately a guard fell in around the prisoners, and they were taken to a small room in the rear of the house. It seemed to have been a place for storing perishable food in summer, being below the level of the ground, having near the ceiling a little slit of a window, barred and covered with a wire screen and flush with the pavement of the court without.

Darrell was a man not prone to despair, but he could not see a way of safety here. It looked like the end of this world to him, and the fate was harder because it was incomprehensible. He could not understand Kilzlar's action. Surely it was not based upon any idea of military justice, for it must have been obvious to the dullest mind that Darrell would not seriously have resisted the invaders of Gredskov. Could it be that Kilzlar credited the story that Darrell had betrayed Vera to the Parisian police? The idea belonged in the realms of delirium. Then where could a legitimate explanation be found?

"I haven't time to think it out," said Darrell to himself. "I must make some sort of play for liberty. Can my guards be bought?"

He still had the money which had escaped the searches in his cell at Stavropol, and it was a sum to tempt a soldier. Darrell kicked upon the heavy wooden door of the room and cried out in Russian to the guards, but there was no response. He was not even ordered to keep quiet. An hour passed in this vain attempt; then suddenly the door was flung open, and he beheld with surprise the face of the Circassian officer, Korna, whom he had seen in Paris.

In the doorway of the cellar from which the prison room opened there had been planted a flaming torch, and its light struck well upon the young Circassian. He was dressed in a rough, long coat, covering an officer's uniform—a colonel's, as it seemed from the glimpse that Darrell had of it where the overcoat was open at the throat.

"Come," said Korna hoarsely.

"Has the moon risen?" asked Darrell, while Kevski, who had been sitting upon the floor, staggered to his feet, with a groan.

"I have not come with a friend party," answered Korna, "and my life is



"Come," said Korna hoarsely.

In more peril than yours. If I show you a way of escape, where will you go?"

"To Motman Khan, at Vladikaukas," answered Darrell.

"Ah," cried Korna, "so I supposed! Be my friend with him. I need one."

"What do you mean?"

"Kilzlar finds me in the way—as he found you."

"I am in his way?"

"He loves Vera Shevaloff."

"He?" cried Darrell. "That scoundrel!"

"Even he," answered Korna. "It is a strange world. But we have no time for words. Come."

He led the way out of the cellar into the court.

"Where are the guards?" asked Darrell, amazed.

"They have gone to report you dead and buried," answered Korna. "I made them my friends."

"But Varnek, who received the order for the execution?"

"Is also my friend. It was a rare chance, for I have not many. He will report to Kilzlar that you were killed while attempting to escape."

They were hurrying along a dark street, at the end of which Darrell could make out dimly in the light of the rising moon an open space, with the city wall beyond. They crossed the field and came to the very spot where Darrell had been stationed during the siege of the city.

A sentry challenged them, and Korna advanced to meet him, giving the countersign and adding:

"These are men with a message to deliver. They must leave the city in secret."

Then in a whisper to Darrell:

"If you are grateful, have Motman Khan transfer me to his staff. If I remain with Kilzlar, he will kill me and dishonor my name. I am taking desperate risks."

"I will not forget," said Darrell, clasping his hand.

"There are pickets beyond the city," said Korna, "but in such a broken country you cannot fail to pass them. Farewell. This is a strange thing I am doing, but it is my only chance."

Darrell and Kevski were lowered over the wall, and when they touched the ground the Russian said in a trembling whisper:

"Now I am alive. For a long time I have seemed to be dead."

"My friend," said Darrell, "you had reason."

They passed the picket line without trouble—indeed without having any evidence that such a thing existed. About midnight they halted in the midst of a deep wood and there lay down to sleep. It was hunger that awakened Darrell, and his first consciousness was of an anxious attempt to remember when he had last had food. It seemed a lapse of weeks. He threw a bit of wood at Kevski, who was slumbering heavily on a bank of moss, and the Russian, sitting up, with blinking eyes, laid a hand upon the region of his empty stomach and groaned.

Kevski struggled to his feet and stumbled out of the little hollow in which they had slept. He vanished among the trees, but returned presently to say that he had got his bearings and believed that he knew where food could be obtained.

"Wait here," said he, "and I will bring you some. If we both forage, we shall never meet again, for you do not know the country. It is necessary, therefore, for you to remain in a place that I can find again."

Darrell agreed, and Kevski struck off among the trees at a good pace. An hour passed. Darrell began to experiment with the bark of a tree that had an agreeable odor, but was not particularly nourishing. The time dragged along until Darrell felt sure that it was past noon. The situation was becoming serious. He ventured out of the hollow a little way in the direction that Kevski had taken, but could gain no hint of what had become of him. The sun began to sink toward the west. Darrell was positively starving. It seemed impossible to wait longer. Either Kevski had been captured or had hopelessly lost his way.

As evening approached Darrell left his hiding place and struck out in the general direction taken by Kevski. He proceeded with caution, for in reality he was between two foes. If captured in that region by the Circassians, he would be taken back to Gredskov, where his fate was certain, and if by Russian troops advancing, or moving toward any point of concentration, he stood the chance of being identified as an escaped prisoner, with consequences not much preferable to death.

His progress was slow, but bit by bit he opened wider the space between him and Gredskov, going always toward Vladikaukas. Hour after hour, with his senses alert, he kept on, till he reached a river.

It was a starry night, and careful search proved that there were no pickets to be seen in either direction. He took the road, but kept within the shadow of some trees that marked the boundary of pasture lands along it.

After traveling a few miles in this way he came to a farmhouse. He had not had a morsel to eat since the bombardment of Gredskov had commenced. Danger lay within the farmhouse, but starvation lay without. He crept nearer and nearer, listened for dogs, but the place was wrapped in the silence of the tomb.

The door of the house was wide open. He knew that folk of any kind if sleeping there would not have their doors open when armies swarmed around. He walked boldly in.

Darrell had no matches, nor did he find any. The light from the stars came in but feebly, and he groped in the darkness, seeking food, but the best that he found was a half loaf of dry bread. With this and water from the well he made a meal, and then, utterly exhausted, he threw himself upon a rude couch and went to sleep.

He awoke with the sun and began a search through the house. It was a rude affair of mud and a kind of baked clay. It consisted of a story and low attic above. In a cellar which was a mere hole in the rock upon which the house was built he found some dried meat and fish and a few bottles of native liquor, strong and harsh. It was not difficult to remember a better meal, but few had ever satisfied a greater need.

Refreshed by the hard fare, he was about to continue his way toward Vladikaukas when suddenly he was aware of the tramping of many hoofs on the road that ran before the house, and through a window he beheld a considerable body of cavalry advancing. Among the officers at the head of the column he discerned, to his utter amazement, the burly form and harsh countenance of Prince Kilzlar.

This road must be a main highway, but what had brought Kilzlar out of Gredskov? As this thought ran through Darrell's mind he saw the column halt directly before the house, and Kilzlar, dismounting, walked straight toward the door.

CHAPTER X.  
A MESSAGE FROM MOTMAN KHAN.

WHEN the caravan comes up," said Prince Kilzlar as he entered the house, "bring the head men to me here."

An aid saluted and went back toward the road, while Kilzlar, with several officers around him, sat down upon a stool and lighted a cigar.

At that moment Darrell was lying upon the floor of the attic, almost directly above Kilzlar's head. He had a good view of the prince through a chink, and he could hear as well as the men in the room below.

"This seems to be the best place to halt them," Kilzlar continued. "I will teach these shrewd fellows not to dodge their toll."

The game was obvious to Darrell. The prince had got wind of some rich caravan that would ordinarily have passed through Gredskov, but, hearing that the town was held, had circled it, well knowing what tribute would be exacted by the revolutionists.

It was not long before a babble of voices came from the direction of the

road, and then there appeared five Turkish merchants under a guard of soldiers.

The scene that ensued began by being grimly amusing and ended in pitiful tragedy. For as much as he could understand of the bargaining it seemed to Darrell that the merchants were being royally bled, but apparently the prince understood them better than the American did. Having received certain sums in gold that was carefully stored away in bags, Kilzlar dismissed four of the merchants and detained the fifth, who was the youngest of them, a sharp looking fellow, tall, smooth shaven and rather handsome.

By Kilzlar's orders he was left alone with this man, and immediately an acrimonious discussion ensued, the prince asserting that he had been cheated regarding the value of the caravan and that many rich jewels were among its merchandise. The tall fellow denied it boldly, and Kilzlar's temper rose. Suddenly, to Darrell's unspeakable horror, the prince whipped out his sword and struck the offending merchant dead at a blow. It was a murder of the coarsest brutality, and if there had been a second's time for interference Darrell would have been unable to witness such a crime without an effort to prevent it, but the deed was done in a flash.

Instantly there came a loud rapping at the closed door, and a voice without cried:

"Excellency, it is Korna with a message from Motman Khan!"

"Bid him enter," said Kilzlar. "Alone."

The young man came in hastily, but as he raised his hand to salute he saw the body on the floor and started back. "Have you never seen a dead man before?" growled Kilzlar. "Come! What is this message? Is Motman Khan not satisfied with what has been done?"

"Motman Khan is satisfied," replied Korna. "Who would not be? All is well with us. Gredskov is in our hands, and your excellency as governor of the place will control the pass. Every caravan that crosses between Gredskov and Tiflis must pay tribute to our cause."

"One of them has just done so," answered Kilzlar. "But the message?"

"Why, it is here," said Korna, handing the prince a letter. "It appears that Motman Khan has learned of the presence in Gredskov of the American, Darrell. The Khan wishes his life to be spared."

"But he did not die?" said Kilzlar. "Why, then, have you run from Gredskov to tell me this?"

"Because," replied Korna, "since your departure this morning I have been told that the American escaped, and, thinking that he might fall into your hands again, I hurried forward with the order."

"The Princess Vera seems much interested," said Kilzlar.

Another party of soldiers had by this time invaded the prison, and the structure resounded with yells of rage as the evidences of the massacre were discovered. Kevski shook with terror, believing that the slaughter of the prisoners meant death to every one wearing the uniform of Russia in that city. Nevertheless throughout the wild scene that followed the officer to whom they had surrendered succeeded in protecting them, and eventually they were lodged under guard in a room of the military barracks where were gathered about fifty other prisoners who by various kinds of good fortune had escaped the sword.

At 9 o'clock that evening Darrell and Kevski were summoned before Prince Kilzlar, who had established headquarters in the house that had been occupied by the Russian military commander whose dead body lay at that moment on a bench under the stone portico.

"I could not say, your excellency," was the reply. "I have not been in the confidence of the lady as much as you."

"You lie! You know that this American would have won the hand of Princess Vera in marriage if we had not got her out of Paris."

"Perhaps, your excellency," said Korna warily.

"And now Motman Khan sends a message about this very American. Well, what was he doing in Stavropol?"

Korna smiled.

"I believe, your excellency, that he came from Paris to find the princess."

Kilzlar cursed under his breath and opened the letter.

"You were right," he said. "Motman Khan commands me to seek this prisoner and send him free."

"I knew that was the message," said Korna. "Surely we have no cause to deal otherwise with an American. We are fighting Russia."

"Are we?" cried Kilzlar fiercely.

"Are you the one to tell me whom we are fighting?"

"Not I, your excellency," answered Korna. "But as to this man—"

"As to this man?" echoed Kilzlar. "Tell me what you know of his escape, for I can read in your face that you are sure he did not die last night. Dog, I believe you saved him!"

Korna did not reply.

"Where is he?" demanded Kilzlar, his hand on his sword. "Tell me or I will cut the secret out of your heart!"

"I do not know," answered Korna, "but I know this: If you draw upon me, I shall defend myself, and if you kill me you will have trouble explaining it. I bear our leader's message."

"Our leader!" sneered Kilzlar. "No one leads me. Our leader is my mарионette, and, as for this message, I have not received it."

"If you expect to force me to support such a lie, you do not know me," answered Korna. "I shall report what I have done."

"You will not live to do it!" exclaimed the prince, springing in front of the door, with his sword in his hand. "Do you see that man upon the floor? He wears a weapon. Well, he flew into a

rage and struck you down. Then I killed him. That is the story. The



"You will not live to do it!"

Khan's letter shall be buried in your pocket, and I will have that American in my power before night."

There was a clash of steel, and Darrell, looking down, saw Kilzlar pressing his antagonist hard and driving him backward from the door. Evidently the prince was the better swordsman, and the end seemed sure.

It was impossible to lie still and see this murder done. With no impulse but the compulsion of honor Darrell sprang down from his place of concealment, alighting directly behind Kilzlar. Indeed he narrowly missed coming down upon the villain's head.

At the sound of the fall the prince sprang aside, half turning, and at that instant Darrell struck him upon the chin with a swinging blow of the right hand. It was as he had been taught to strike, a trick of the American boxer, and well executed. Kilzlar stood perfectly erect for an instant and then fell forward upon his face.

Korna, with his back against the wall, stared speechless, unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"You!" he cried. "You—you have saved me! And yet we both no better than dead!"

"We've no one chance in fifty thousand!" cried Darrell. "Strip that man!"

He pointed to the prostrate Turk, and then, stooping down, he helped Korna to tear off the garments from the corpse. When this was done, the body was thrust up into the attic. Kilzlar still lay where he had fallen, motionless.

"It is only a matter of minutes," said Darrell. "He will revive. Now I am the Turkish merchant. You have arrested me, at the prince's orders, and are taking me back to Gredskov. The prince does not wish to be disturbed for awhile. Here, help me to lay him on this bench, in case a soldier should get a peep in here as we open the door. Now, come. Can you play your part?"

"I can," responded Korna.

To Be Continued.

Divorce After 26 Years.

After twenty-six years of wedded life Mary A. Carpenter has brought suit for divorce from her husband Charles Carpenter. She says she has lived in Allen county for twenty-four years and was married to her husband in Ottawa in 1876. To them were born nine children, some of whom are now grown, and all now living. Carpenter is a farmer and plaintiff says she worked hard to save money, finally breaking down in health. Her husband grew abusive and cruel, swore at her, lost his temper easily and once when she saved from the sale of butter and eggs for curtains and things to adorn their home he got mad and tore them down. Again he refused to get a doctor when she was ill and her sons sent for one. He owns 120 acres of land and live stock and improvements easily worth \$4,583 which has been accumulated jointly by the two. Plaintiff says he has threatened her and asks that she be given a divorce, a share in the property and protection from him.

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